

# ***IOWA OUTDOORS***

**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
**[www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov)**

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## **NUMBERS GROW, SO DOES TRASH ON PROJECT AWARE**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

It's amazing what you can find, canoeing down the lazy river.

Patio furniture

*A basketball rim...and basketball*

*Pots, pans, china*

Just the tip of the proverbial iceberg, as Merry Rankin ran through some of the inventory hauled out of the riverbanks, sandbars, snags and other nooks and crannies of the Middle and North Raccoon Rivers June 16-23 on Project AWARE. Rankin, from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources was among the dozens of 'collectors,' as volunteers floated their boatloads of trash to drop off points throughout the weeklong canoe trip.

*Pesticide containers*

*247 tires*

*Rolls of old fence*

"It's a nice, friendly canoe trip down the river," laughs Brian Soenen, coordinator for Project AWARE. "In addition, it's a dirty trip down the river. Instead of just enjoying the beauty of the river, we're taking those unsightly things from the river itself. We're removing them, recycling them, putting them where they should have been, which is anywhere but the river." Short for A Watershed Awareness River Experience, Project

AWARE marked its fifth year, with more than 370 people involved. The backbone of the floating trash pickup is the volunteers who paddle a new stretch of river each day, bringing in the piles of trash, all 27 tons of it.

*Couch*  
*Wire bedsprings*  
*School desk, no seat*

The volunteers ranged in age from teens to 60 and 70-somethings. Some have been on board all five years. Many paddle all week, some for a day or two. “We have a larger number of people coming each year. This year, well over 50 percent were first timers,” proclaimed Soenen. A lot of the trash they find is somewhat predictable; old fencing, stock tanks, thousands of plastic or glass bottles, and fishing gear. Some of it makes you laugh, forgetting for a moment that it was dumped by some one who didn’t want to bother properly disposing of it. “Like a stove. How does a stove get into the river?” asks Mary Skopec, one of the drop site collectors, with the DNR’s water monitoring section of the Geological Survey Bureau. “There’s an old desk, part of a car. Some of it is surprising, but we’re starting to see it all at this point.”

*AM Radio, homemade stand*  
*Rotary dial phone*  
*Toy Tonka Tractor*

Last year, AWARE floated the Iowa and English Rivers, below Iowa City. Just weeks after a tornado walloped the town, volunteers hauled in a small mountain of debris at their entry point. Severe weather played into this year’s planned 112-mile paddle, too. Severe storms and high water late in the week kept them on dry land for the last day. Instead, they tackled storm cleanup at Walnut Woods State Park, their Friday night campsite. “We went from a disaster zone to basically 100-percent cleaned up,” said park manager Tim Gedler. “We were looking at a couple months of work, between all the other park duties we have. I’m just elated about the volunteer cleanup.”

*One refrigerator*  
*Three stoves*  
*Five washing machines*

DNR Director Rich Leopold, who joined the paddlers late in the week, applauded their efforts, referring back to landmark environmental advances in the 1960s and ‘70s. “All those things happened in a very short window of time,” noted Leopold. “I think we are in another one of those windows. There are a lot of very exciting things happening. What you are doing is significant. You are showing the state that you are here to stay.”

*Three-speed bike*  
*Combine equipment*  
*Riding lawnmower*

A day, a week on the river, though, reminds us that there's still plenty to do.

## **STATE PARK CAMPGROUNDS FILLING QUICKLY**

DES MOINES – Iowa State Parks will be swelling to near capacity as campers and picnickers gather to celebrate Independence Day with friends and family. With July 4 falling on a Wednesday, campgrounds are expected to be busy on the weekends before and after the holiday.

The campsite reservation system has been a popular choice for many campers. Electrical sites are still available for reservation at Beeds Lake, Brushy Creek, Dolliver, Fairport, Geode, Green Valley, Honey Creek, Lake Darling, Lewis and Clark, Nine Eagles, Pikes Peak, Pilot Knob, Red Haw and Viking Lake state parks. Non-electric sites on the reservation system and first come, first serve, are available at nearly every state park.

“The first come, first serve sites will probably getting pretty full by this weekend. I would guess nearly all of the electrical sites will be gone soon,” said Kevin Szcodronski, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources state parks bureau. “By this weekend, if someone wants a campsite, they would be wise to call the park to check availability.”

With the parks filling to near capacity, campers should plan ahead and bring plenty of ice, bug spray and sun screen. “Our campgrounds will be busy so people need to really be aware of their noise level and to be courteous to their neighbors,” Szcodronski said. “Leave the fireworks at home.”

The DNR is also encouraging campers to get their firewood from local sources so to not unintentionally transport any tree diseases or invasive species from one location to another.

The DNR will be fully staffed at the state parks during the extended holiday weekend. “Family gatherings over a holiday weekend at a state park are how memories are made, and we are happy to help with the enjoyment,” Szcodronski said.

For more information, contact Szcodronski at 515-281-8674.

## **STOP AQUATIC HITCHHIKERS**

BOONE - As the Fourth of July approaches, the Iowa DNR is asking boaters and anglers to take a minute to check for any unwanted hitchhikers and protect Iowa lakes and streams.

Eurasian watermilfoil, zebra mussels, and other aquatic invasive species often spread between waterbodies by hitchhiking on boats, in bait buckets, on aquatic plants, and with other equipment used in the water. These aquatic invaders can create serious problems if they become established in our waters.

"Public action is key to preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species," said Kim Bogenschutz, coordinator for the DNR's aquatic invasive species program.

Boaters and anglers can do their part to help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species to the state's waterbodies by taking a few simple steps each time when leaving a lake or river.

- Remove any visible plants, animals, or mud before transporting equipment.
- Drain water from all equipment (motor, livewell, bilge, transom well) before transporting.
- Clean and dry anything that comes into contact with water (boats, trailers, equipment, boots, clothing, dogs). Before transporting to another waterbody either:
- Rinse your boat and equipment with hot (104°F) water; or
- Spray your boat and trailer with high-pressure water at a carwash; or
- Dry your boat and equipment for at least 5 days.
- Never release plants, fish, or animals into a waterbody unless they came out of that waterbody. Empty unwanted bait in the trash.

It is illegal to possess or transport prohibited aquatic invasive species such as zebra mussels or Eurasian watermilfoil in Iowa. Signs are posted at public accesses to identify infested waters. More information about aquatic invasive species and a list of infested waters can be found in the 2007 Iowa Fishing Regulations booklet.

Zebra mussels are one example of an aquatic invasive species that has hitchhiked its way into Iowa. Zebra mussels were first documented in the Mississippi River in Iowa in 1992. There were no reports of zebra mussels from interior waters until 2005 when they were found in Clear Lake. The next example of zebra mussels on the move in Iowa occurred in 2006 when zebra mussels were discovered in Lake Delhi, near Manchester.

The sighting of zebra mussels in Clear Lake, more than 100 miles from the nearest known infestation, highlights the spread of invasive species. "The zebra mussels in Clear Lake probably arrived on or in a boat that had picked up the mussels in an

infested waterbody,” Bogenschutz said. “People travel all over Iowa and the U.S. with their boats in tow. If they visit an infested waterbody, they can unintentionally transport zebra mussels, Eurasian watermilfoil, or other aquatic invasive species if they do not take the proper precautions to prevent their spread. Remember to inspect, clean, and drain.”

**For more information, contact Bogenschutz at 515-432-2823.**

## **POISON HEMLOCK TURNS UP IN IOWA**

DES MOINES – Poison hemlock has found its way to Iowa. The tall, attractive white flowering plant that resembles Queen’s Anne’s Lace was introduced to North America from Europe in the 1800s. It is found in nearly every state and southern Canada

Poison hemlock *Conium maculatum* is a member of the wild carrot family, and grows in moist open areas along roadsides, railroad right-a-ways, stream banks, irrigation ditches, hiking trails and open areas of flood plains of rivers and streams. Poison hemlock is a biennial plant that grows from seed, during its second year of growth it can grow 3 to 8 feet tall producing tall, hollow stems and white flowers from late May to August in an umbrella-shaped bunch. The seeds of poison hemlock usually drop nearby parent plants forming dense stands along waterways.

“The stem of poison hemlock is light green in color, thick-looking but hollow, smooth and is marked with purple spots or streaks that is a definite identifier,” said John Walkowiak, a forester and Land Protection Leader with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “Natural resource managers report seeing more poison hemlock across the state perhaps due to the mild winters and flooding that helps to spread the seed.”

In ancient Greece, poison hemlock was used to poison political prisoners. It is reported that Socrates when condemned to die, drank the poisonous juice to commit suicide. Although cases of human poisoning from poison hemlock are rare, mainly because someone may have mistakenly confused it with an edible wild carrot, people should avoid contact or handling poison hemlock. Poison hemlock’s lower portion of the stem and roots, along with its seeds are very toxic to cattle, goats and horses.

Poison hemlock is a secondary noxious weed and requires control. Repeated mowing removes the plant and reduces its competitive ability by depleting its energy reserves in the taproot and preventing seed production. Prescribed fire has limited success without adequate dry fuel to burn the plant before it sets seed. Chemical control using phenoxy herbicides or glyphosate herbicides provides good control but must be carefully applied near waterways and to protect desirable plants. Repeated herbicide applications may be required to deplete the seed bank. A European palearctic or hemlock moth larva may offer possibilities for biological control as it defoliates leaves, young stem tissue, flowers and seeds.

Contacting the local county weed commissioner or your local Iowa State University County Extension office for more advice on control.

**For more information, contact Walkowiak at 515-281-5218 or by cell at 515-249-2944.**